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RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION

Written statement*/ submitted by Fraternité Notre Dame, Inc., a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[8 March 2001]

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*/ This written statement is issued, unedited, as received in English, French and Spanish from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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One of the objectives of the UN is the respect of human rights. Fraternite Notre Dame, working on the different continents at the service of the most destitute, with no distinction of class, race, sex or creed, has witnessed, just as other groups did, that these rights are being violated in some countries suffering from extreme poverty, but what is unthinkable in the 21st century, these rights are even being violated in our European countries, said to be free, civilized and respectful of human rights.

In the writings our rulers refer to, our Constitution, freedom of conscience is assured. France counts in her constitution intangible rights. She guarantees free exercise of worship under the only restrictions dictated in the interest of public order. The law of separation between Church and State guarantees freedom of conscience. Democracy, as is taught to children in school books, is a political system but also a moral code: one explains to pupils that it is the system that best protects diversity, that best succeeds in having people from different origins, opinions, convictions and tastes, live together under common laws. Truly, this is what is being taught to our pupils from the 21st century, and this is what they believe, since they are asked to do so.

Now, what can be seen in France, what do we experience in France?

A fanatic and strenuous war against spiritual minorities, against educational trends that do not comply with the main trend of thinking imposed. Then, would what we teach to our dear children be lies? Would democracy no longer be what it used to? What happened to enriching diversity?

Fraternite Notre Dame, after the example of other minorities, had to undergo a process of intimidation, misinformation, slander, pressure and blackmailing. Certain Catholics adopt a narrowness of mind, a sectarianism towards all other forms of convictions or expression different from their own, to the point of exerting pressure and implementing religious persecution; both are unworthy of Christian brothers, in a European democracy, on a land, France, "called the eldest daughter of the Church".

Under the cover of the discriminatory anti-sect label, political and religious forces, united by a common sectarian thinking, exert pressure upon minorities such as ours, preventing the proper functioning of our social and humanitarian activities. Examples to be cited would be too numerous.

The absence of freedom of expression is a sign of authoritarian regimes. The media channels in France, in a series called "Hunting Sects in France", follow one another in rapid succession and make headlines on television news and the press, with public denunciations, limiting freedom of expression or convictions. What happened to the time when religious freedom in France was not jeopardized? When educational trends that acknowledged the spiritual dimension of the child were able to express themselves, because school teaching in the Republic would guarantee freedom of thinking and expression?

Fraternite Notre Dame estimates that each individual may have a different way of thinking and yet be free to express it, and she was able to assess that in the various countries where she opened missions with humanitarian aims, churches interfered before governments to safeguard their privileges and make sure that minorities would be silenced.

Fraternite Notre Dame observed behaviors showing religious discrimination in certain African countries, where the installation of bishops and priests in their countries of origin was not favored. Such behaviors do not allow the expression of Faith to thrive, but maintains a form of moral tutorship, instead of promoting the cultural identity of these countries. There is no reason not to accept religious minorities, as long as they do not imperil the country, or prejudice the freedom of individuals.

Diversity and differences, which our schoolbooks refer to in the 21st century for our young French pupils, should enrich us instead of creating further divisions.

If respect for others in their differences is taken for granted in human rights, we testify here – and we thank you to be able to do so – that it is not implemented towards minorities in our European countries.

What we do not explain to children in schoolbooks is that major groups impose the monopoly of a particular viewpoint while censuring others, granting themselves the right to control everything, under the pretext that they are the majority in numbers. Number is not what makes up the quality of a particular group. The Democratic State is supposed to protect the weak against the power of the strong.

In its orphanages (Haiti, Niger), its hospitals (Mongolia), its schools, soup kitchens for the homeless in Chicago, New York, Paris; or in Martinique, El Salvador, etc., Fraternite Notre Dame makes it her duty to consider each human being with a same respect and a same state of mind.

Fraternite Notre Dame works in various countries, serving the miserable, street children, patients afflicted with AIDS, orphans, prisoners, the handicapped, the starving. The state of mind, in which prevail peace, charity, tolerance and respect, and which is in keeping with the Declaration of Human Rights, is transmitted by Fraternite Notre Dame's Founder to its religious missionaries and lay volunteers.

In this the 3rd millennium, Fraternite Notre Dame expresses a wish to see in Europe respect for Human Rights turn effective in the actions performed, and not only in words, so that peace, unity and tolerance may prevail within her.